



[Freddie Vazquez]  
[United Steelworkers]  
Labor & Public Employees Committee Public Hearing  
February 7, 2023

### **SB 938 AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING WORKERS**

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert, and the distinguished members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Freddie Vazquez, I live in Watertown, CT. I work as a groundskeeper at Catholic Cemeteries Association and I am President of Union Local 14323. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 938.

Connecticut workers who go on strike are unable to collect unemployment benefits as they are presumed to have left their jobs voluntarily. No worker makes the decision to go on strike lightly. It is an extremely difficult choice because workers risk a loss of income. They also risk the permanent loss of their jobs, especially when replacement workers hired to continue operations during the strike stay on as permanent employees. But by the time a strike vote is taken, after months, and sometimes years, of exhausting all avenues provided in the collective bargaining process, workers usually feel they have absolutely no choice. A strike may be the only option they have to resolve differences with their employer.

As President of Steelworkers Union Local 14323, I have been in negotiations numerous times. Proposals that companies bring to the table are not always well received by the members. I have personally been told in negotiations that the company is financially doing very well, they just want to have us contribute more for various items and also small raises for the union members. When questions are asked about "what now" or a strike is mentioned, many concerns arise. The financial hardship it brings is a huge concern. Being able to receive unemployment benefits for striking workers will make the decision to strike a bit easier. Standing together in solidarity so our message can get across to companies against their proposals that we find are not fair is very important. We need the 938 ACT concerning unemployment benefits for striking workers so we can leverage our members who are on the fence due to the financial concerns the strikes bring.

SB 938 is not a measure designed to enrich workers. Instead, it is designed to avoid a labor dispute. If an employer understands that striking workers will be eligible to collect unemployment benefits after a two-week waiting period, likely resulting in a small increase to their unemployment insurance rates, they will be more likely to bargain in good faith to avoid a work stoppage altogether.

Unionized workplaces raise standards for all workers. When striking workers can access unemployment benefits to help sustain themselves and their families, it empowers them to advocate for protections that benefit all workers.

New York and New Jersey already allow striking workers to collect unemployment benefits. New York reduced its waiting period from 7 weeks to 2 weeks in 2020. New Jersey has a 30-day waiting period but is considering legislation to reduce it to 2 weeks in order to mirror New York's law. SB 938 follows the example set by our neighboring states. We urge the Committee to support this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.